

Dr. Burgess Weekly Address December 15, 2017

Protecting Those Who Serve Our Country

Hello, this is your Congressman Michael Burgess.

This week has been full of news, but I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you about something happening in Washington that you might not have heard about. On December 7, I introduced a bill that would protect federal security contractors working overseas from unfair sentencing requirements so that they can continue to protect our soldiers, diplomats, and civil servants to their full ability.

Our nation is fortunate to have hardworking federal security contractors serving with our soldiers and diplomats. It is estimated that more than 200,000 federal contractors have served overseas in support of military and diplomatic personnel. These men and women play an integral role in supporting the mission of the United States abroad.

Under current law, a person who discharges a firearm in conjunction with a crime of violence is subject to a mandatory minimum sentence. This provision in the law became personal for me, and for many in North Texas, when a constituent of the 26th Congressional District was sentenced to a mandatory minimum of 30 years in prison after being found guilty of firearms offenses while serving as a security contractor overseas. In 2007, my constituent and his teammates were employed as State Department contractors during Operation Iraqi Freedom. While they were escorting a United States diplomatic convoy through Baghdad, an oncoming suspicious vehicle failed to stop. The team opened fire to defend the convoy, and unfortunately there were civilian deaths.

At first, the contractors were investigated and cleared of any wrongdoing. Then in 2010, then-Vice President Biden promised the Iraqi Prime Minister he would re-open the investigation and bring those involved to trial.

As a result of this second effort, four convictions were obtained and subsequently during sentencing each received a mandatory minimum sentence as required under 18 U.S.C. 924 (c), a statute enacted in the 1980s to reduce violence during the height of the war on drugs. However, it was never intended to apply to men and women serving their country in a war zone. In fact, this was the first instance of this law being applied to American citizens working overseas.

It is unthinkable that civilian contractors, who are required to carry weapons by the United States government to protect United States personnel overseas, have faced unintended consequences of this statute. It is time that we fix this oversight so that those who serve and protect our country will not have to fear unfair sentencing requirements. My bill to

protect these contractors is a step in the right direction, and I will continue to update you on this matter as it progresses.

As always, I appreciate your comments and your concerns on this issue or any other issue. May God bless you and your family, and as the song says, God bless you Texas.